

---

# FRIEND OR TROLL?

## HOW SOCIALLY MEDIATED EXPRESSION AFFECTS BLOG MANAGEMENT

Michelle L. Krueger

Master's Capstone in Strategic Communication

School of Journalism

University of Minnesota

2012

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Initial Research Question 1</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Research Question 2</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Literature Review</b>	<b>5</b>
<i>Affect Theory and Feedback Loops</i>	11
<b>Methods – Research Question 1</b>	<b>15</b>
<i>Audience Impact Survey</i>	15
<i>Blogger Interviews</i>	16
<b>Methods – Research Question 2</b>	<b>17</b>
<i>Bloggers and Their Audience Survey</i>	17
<b>Discussion of Results and Literature Review</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Suggestions for Further Research</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Appendixes</b>	<b>25</b>
<i>A. Audience Impact Survey</i>	25
<i>B. Interviews</i>	25
<i>C. Bloggers and their Audience Survey – Negative Comments</i>	25

## INTRODUCTION

There is always a conversation going on somewhere, between any number of people. Whether it is whispered intimacies between two people who will never share secrets, or it's bellowed on frenetic city streets as live shouting matches between opposing groups. Conversations in public forums, like those taking place with the Occupy Wall Street protesters who engage with passersby or anti-protest opponents are not just heard by everyone within earshot, these exchanges are broadcast via YouTube, on television and in social media sites, moving at lightening speed across our world. The blogging world is no different as the conversations taking place in the in the blogosphere have their own rapid fire posting and responses and can soon become more public than just one limited website. Going viral isn't just for Justin Bieber anymore.

Some conversations are polite exchanges and some are vituperative debates, but all conversations have different roles of the participants. Whether in listening, talking, writing or commenting, participants communicating in the blogosphere are generally in the role context of a blogger writing and an audience reading. When the readers or audience make comments online (whether on the blog itself or in other forms like email to the blogger or comments posted on other social media sites that link back to the blog), now the world of blogger and audience have started a conversation. The blog and its audience of commentators have started their own creation of viewable content that lives online.

Whether fleeting or enduring, the blog is a media forum where up-to -the minute conversations or dialogues take place. In many instances, it is considered de rigueur for bloggers to comment on the commentators' comments and vice versa, with other commentators from the blogger audience commenting on fellow commentators...creating a cascade of conversations that ebb and flow and take on various tones.

Online conversations can read friendly, curious, enthusiastic, indulgent or supportive. The tone of an online debate or disagreement can also turn negative from argument-baiting to harassment. Blogging commentary has a unique space where negative or supportive comments are directed often towards the blogger, or with the blogger's other readers, but for everyone to view. Of course the tone of the communication can impact the narrative of the blog. As the creator of the blog, how does the audience impact the blogger's online narrative, future strategy of the blog or long-term plans?

## **INITIAL RESEARCH QUESTION 1**

It could easily be assumed that bloggers think and care about what their audience says. It might seem obvious that this concern with audience participation is always on the forefront of blogger's minds because isn't that the point of blogs? To write publicly, be read, get responses and immediately respond with more posts seems to be the definition of blogging.

***In what way and to what extent does this role of audience communication impact the role of the blogger as an intentional narrative creator?*** To study audience impact on a blogger's ongoing content development, initial research was conducted in an audience study and in three in-depth interviews with bloggers.

## **RESEARCH QUESTION 2**

To follow up on key findings from both the audience study and the blogger interviews, additional research narrowed in on the issue of the management of comments, to uncover if audience comments, specifically negative comments, impacted comment management. The assumption was that if bloggers received negative comments, it would impact how they manage their readers' ability to post comments and view content.

How to respond to negative or off-color commentary is a long-time dilemma for communicators.

Unlike much off-line narrative forms that are not directly impacted by the intended

audience only before or after something is published or staged, blogs are an ongoing narrative where every word is laid bare for the audience to get as involved as they can and at any point they choose. Lacking the elements of non-verbal communication like gestures and facial expressions, online conversations can be more off-the-cuff than other written forms of communication. Without voice or physical cues and without the benefit of an editor, blog comments are rife for misunderstandings and mis-readings. The added anonymity of many readers adds to the complexity of negative comments and how they may impact a blog's future content and closer management of their audience.

***For bloggers, to choose to allow, limit or block comments, what are the drawbacks or barriers to full expression of the blog? Do audience comments hinder or enhance the blogging process?***

***What best practices can writers of blogs implement to control/block readers' comments?***

To address research question 2, a bloggers and their audience survey was conducted to learn how bloggers manage comments from their readers and if the tone of comments (positive, neutral, negative) influenced their decision-making when managing comments.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Research conducted on the affect of the audience on bloggers appears to be in an adolescent stage. While studies can be found, drawing a picture of repeated results is not as easy at this point. With the rapidly changing world of social media, research that was done in 2005 may have more problems even if replicated in 2015, due to the rapid changes in technology and media consumption. A review of the literature suggests that bloggers are indeed affected by audience participation.

Using quantitative data from 46 celebrity blogs, Trammell (2005) examined not only bloggers' posts and audience comments, but the trackbacks that the audience used on their own blogs to hyperlink to the original blog posting. Working under Irving Goffman's *The*

*Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Trammell (2005) feels that presentation as an “ongoing process” with “actively managed actions and information” was particularly compelling in celebrityhood findings of motivations: bloggers were motivated to share information, audience commentators were motivated to fulfill social interaction needs and the audience who used the trackback feature was motivated by a desire to share information, just like the original blogger’s motivation. Most revealing was that the commentators had power to change the stream of the conversation within the commentary forum on the original blog. Due to the early publication date of 2005, Trammell (2005) rightly notes they have entered virgin territory in researching bloggers and comments.

In Jang and Stefanone’s (2011) data review of 145 bloggers from 32 countries, they found that bloggers who were more likely to expect their audience to behave like they would in offline settings (e.g. ‘If I share, I expect you will comment’) were also more likely to feel obligated to comment on other people’s blogs when the blogger disclosed personal information. These bloggers were not confined to a specific genre. Criteria for this study included bloggers being above the age of 18 and the style of the blog being a personal journal writing blogs, rather than commercial or pictorial-only blogs.

Here the blogger is scrutinized as both creator and reader of blogs. However, directly linking comments to blogger’s changing behavior *on their own blog* is not directly linked in this study. The study further interprets the blogger/audience relationship to be asynchronous; the blogger may post for a general audience, but they cannot directly target a specific reader, so the conversation is not person-to-person, rather it is person (blogger) to many persons (audience). Similarly, Haferkamp & Krämer (2008) found that the main motivators for audience commentary is “giving feedback, receiving attention and communicating.” While this might motivate the recipients, it was not a factor for the

bloggers whose main motivators were “social affiliation, publicity, self presentation, documentation.” This study found that while both groups were motivated somewhat by social affiliation, there were limitations on the ability to have a completely interactive communication experience in the blogosphere. This interpretation of the blogosphere is a bit dated, now that blogs have better links and are more fully integrated with other online experiences. While only four years have lapsed between this statement of the authors and the present reality on blogs, it exhibits that online technology is rapidly advancing and the users and creators are more connected than ever before.

There is research (Wicks, Bradley, Blackburn, & Fields, 2011) that studied the rebuttal, which is a blogger responding to a comment from the blogger’s audience, by looking at political blogs – those particularly contentious atmospheres with agenda-driven content! Focusing on political rebuttals, he created a codebook of political blog comments during the 2008 presidential campaign. In studying attack comments on blogs, he found that the candidates themselves (John McCain and Barack Obama) had fewer direct attack comments on their person, rather attack comments were more likely to be at the political party or towards nonaligned blogs. Wicks et al. concludes that it is easier for audiences to attack an institution or site, rather than an individual. Additionally, if attacks or rebuttals came from an indirect source, rather than the candidate’s “mouth,” sympathetic blogs can be used strategically to create negative feedback about an opponent’s candidate. “The study does suggest that blogs serve as a forum for attacks, acclaims, and to a limited extent, rebuttals...As in past studies, it seems that presidential candidates avoid using campaign blogs for the purpose of attacking, choosing instead to leave that chore to the websites and blogs of the political parties,” (Wicks et al., 2011, p.664).

Nutrient-dense data conducted by Droge et al. (Droge, Stanko, & Pollitte, 2010) on consumer blogs confirms that online communities of early product adopter bloggers who directly interact with their audiences can create significant actions because both the audience and the bloggers are not only paying attention to each other, but their actions are directly impacted by the thoughts, opinion and comments of the other. The research on the blog content revealed that the community of bloggers *can* change the direction of a product line by creating their own marketing agenda simply by virtue of their community-driven communication about the product line. The paper showed that in poorly monitored blogging communities of early adopters, product managers may have disappointing results for their fledgling products, but if they engage early on with leading online communities, their products have better chances of success because the product managers are actively co-creating with the bloggers.

Additionally, bloggers create online communities through common interests via posts and comments and information sharing via links. These same co-creations or shifts in content development are happening in between scientists and journalists as studied by Allan (2011) and Secko et al. (Secko, Tlalka, Dunlop, Kingdon, & Amend, 2011). Due to the collaborative form of the communication between science blogger and journalist that is found throughout all the research in the Allan article, it informs this paper's research question that the audience is neither stagnant nor uninvolved; the audience may have their own agendas and motivation (Allan, 2011). Journalists also found themselves looking at the commentary as a 'stress test' to determine how they would frame related stories based on what the audience was concerned about. In this way the audience directly impacted the blogger's future narrative. The conclusions of the Allan article stressed that journalism blogging is not a one-way street and that online interactions is changing the way journalists work, particularly in crafting their narratives online.



Defining news stories as plot-driven narratives, reinforces the supposition that bloggers are constructing a narrative that may be influenced by audience communications (Secko et al., 2011) and confirms the sharing nature of the Internet (hyperlinking) and how the conversation between a blogger and their audience expands outside the organization of the original forum and into a wider audience (Guillory, 2007). This hyperlinking of narrative fuels Dean's (2011) use of network theory as a setting for blogs.

The finding that audiences want interaction with the blogs they read is a theme consistent with the literature from Gilpin et al. (Gilpin, Palazzolo, & Brody, 2010) and Sanderson (2010). Sanderson (2010) shows that the audience can be a supportive force that allows bloggers to continue to post online in search of commentary that will bolster the ongoing image of their own narrative. Petray (2011), in her case study on aboriginal activists networked via online social media, showed how the Internet has evolved from standalone "webpages (sic) with only the occasional comment function, to spaces where everyone is an author, (Petry, 2011, p.924).

Research conducted by Mitra (2010) on interactive online communities between queer Indian bloggers and their readers who commented on the blogs was analyzed through the theory of interpretive communities. Queer Indian bloggers interpreted India's first national Gay Pride march through ongoing content creation, analysis and communication with their readers. With a broad base of seven blogs that analyzed both comments between bloggers and their audience as well as the sub conversations between blog readers, the Mitra (2010) study was exhaustive, finding that the commentary of the readers encouraged the bloggers to use talk back strategies to continue this resistance conversation, encouraging more coverage from the bloggers, which eventually increased their status as media authorities. This was a direct result of the online community helping to shape the narrative of the queer blogger's interpretation of the mainstream media's coverage of the event.

This evolution of the interactive space of online blogging shows that the conversation is not static or one-sided. As much of the research shows, the blogosphere is becoming more and more interconnected, with readers and bloggers interacting and in constant conversations. While the blogger to audience communication can appear as top-down content, the case study of Australian Aboriginal activists (Petray, 2011), the science bloggers impacting journalism (Allan, 2011; Secko et al., 2011; Guillory, 2007) and the content analysis of product development (Droge et al., 2010) all show that an open and interactive blogging community is also very democratic in function. So democratic that some research (Trammel, 2005) showed the power of the commentators to completely change the conversation within the forum, the subset of conversations where the audience interacts with itself.

While some research (Jang & Stefanone, 2011) sees that the blogger and the audience have an asynchronous relationship, as the blogger is always posting to a general audience and the commentators are posting only to the blogger. This is not really the case because the blogger can respond back to one commentator and the commentators may choose one member for rebuttal (Wicks et al., 2011). In reality, the blogger and the audience do not switch roles, but they can carry on person-to-person conversations in a very public forum, where any kind of conversation can take place, from communications involving personal intimacies (Trammell, 2005; Jang et al., 2011) to those embroiled in attacks (Secko et al, 2011; Wicks et al, 2011).

As Wicks et al. (2011) showed in the rebuttal comments from one commentator towards another commentator, there are subsets of conversations taking place in the blogosphere, where audience members are working amongst themselves in full view of the blogger who can observe these conversations and then take action on the narrative in light of the

dialogue. Acting as a eavesdropper on their own developing blog, the blogger is showing that they are paying attention to what is being talked about their work. When the Red Sox pitcher, Schilling was vindicated by his audience who denounced his attacker (Sanderson, 2010), it would suggest that bloggers are relying heavily on the audience interactions with themselves to make decisions on how to develop their online narratives.

Is a blog ever finished? To build on the dialogue that the Allan (2011) article found between scientists and journalists, Secko et al. (2011) examined the issues that arise with the scientific journalism narratives as science journalists communicate with their audience of readers through blogging themselves and dealing with real-time commentary from their audiences. The researchers found that because the publicized science news is being commented on by readers, the news piece does not become finalized. It can't, because the nature of blogging is one of openness; the science journalism narratives are always open to audience experiences and commentary. As a result, the news piece changes because of this interaction. Unlike a painter who might step back from his canvas and announce "It is finished!" a blogger never finishes their online work, it is a living, ongoing narrative that is ever evolving (Mitra, 2010).

## AFFECT THEORY AND FEEDBACK LOOPS

Before written text, literary expression was an oral tradition and the narrator's always present audience may have had greater impact on the evolving narrative before storytellers were given an alphabet and a tablet to sit and inscribe tales in isolation. While most social media is often railed against as an isolating activity, the timing between writing a piece, posting it and then hearing feedback is far shorter than the novelist who writes, seeks a publisher, endures editor involvement, awaits production and distribution, frets over

purchase, reading and then learns of their audience's commentary/critique. The feedback loop is much longer in time, space and steps.

Does this mean that new media will change audience participation? "Contemporary affective networks rely on the marking, adding, forwarding, and circulating of messages not because doing so 'means' something but simply to communicate," (Dean, 2010).

Of course, most writers will admit to early readers of manuscripts who help shape drafts, but less often in such a public media space as the blog.

Because of the affective network Jodi Dean (2010) discusses of the audience and the blogger, literature shows is that the audience is critical to the creation and the changes made in future posts. When bloggers are concerned with literary expression, the literature shows that MORE bloggers are conscious of the opinions of their readers and expressly write or change course as a result of comments (for, against, in reaction to). To lose the audience interventions would be to have a very different outcome in writing.

Jodi Dean, the author of *Blog Theory*, is particularly interested in feedback loops. While seemingly not a fan of this media form, is drawn into it because of its anxiety-producing affects. Dean's work is concerned with critical media theorists also interested in affective dimensions of the network like Patricia Clough who claims this interest is "an intensification of self-reflexivity." Dean's focus is on the "psychoanalytic notion of drive" and theorizes that blogs are so compelling because:

The loops and repetitions of the acephalous circuit of drive describe the movement of the networks of communicative capitalism, the ways its flows capture subjects, intensities, and aspirations. Accompanying each repetition, each loop or reversal, is a little nugget of enjoyment. We contribute to the networks, as creative producers and vulnerable consumers, because we enjoy it. In fact, the open architecture of the Internet enables and requires the capture of enjoyment insofar as it is premised on users' contributions, alterations, and engagement. It's not like cinema where people

only have to show up. For the Internet to function at all (as is abundantly clear in Web 2.0 and 3G mobile networks) people have to use it, add to it, extend it, play with it...contemporary information and communication networks are essentially affective networks.

Dean describes the audience and the bloggers (the “we”) as ‘creative producers’. In *Affective Networks*, Dean writes “Contemporary communication networks are reflexive: we, the users, are creating them. We are producing the affective networks we inhabit, the connections that configure us. We provide the feedback that amplifies or ignores (or write the code that provides the feedback that amplifies or ignores). The more we contribute, the more extensive our submission.” As Berlant (2006) writes, “Affect is channeled within and across media with political consequences and we need to theorize these affects as not only unpredictable (which it can be) but also as strategic, and performed.”

Marianne Martens (2011) reviews books-in-progress via blogging (as well as other online media like email review) by teen girls. *The Amanda Project* is an intriguing example of a new literary form resulting from blogging. Focusing on the affective labor of teen contributors and the commodification of their products (books), she examines how publishers and their power (or fear of its loss) impact user-generated literature.

Pre-Internet, the feedback between teen readers and authors/publishers is an equalized relationship, with gatekeepers of parents, librarians and educators between the teen readers and the publishers. Blogging now is a feedback loop that shortens the time and the space between the two. Martens (2011) argues heavily that the publishers are more directly connected in the feedback loop than even the authors, but in the world of authors as bloggers, the publisher may or may not intrude, especially in the new world of literary creation of author-created blogs. With a publisher-dominated Internet trolling for audiences, Martens (2011) finds the co-creation of several teen books such as *The Gossip*

*Girls* as a way to exploit teen girls who give their time of affect and time of ideas. The publishers see this as peer-to-peer marketing and a way for girls to have a voice. Interestingly, Martens (2011) calls the postings on the *The Amanda Project* blog a way for readers to earn their 'cultural capital'. If they post clever, well-written prose, they may establish themselves as an online persona. If they write a portion of the story, it is a way to market themselves in advance of a book submission.

Some of the most exciting research on bloggers and audiences has been conducted with Arab women bloggers whose work has created what scholar Hoda Elsadda (2010) calls "literary cyber counterpublics." She contends that "Cyberspace, in general, and blogs in particular, have also opened up new forums for alternative cultural and literary expression." This scholarly study of socially mediated literary expression is quite new. Elsadda (2010) contends that the blogosphere is the agent where Arab writers, especially Arab female writers, have created a new territory of literature in public spheres, what she terms "competing counterpublics." Traditionally, Arab writers met (and still do today) in cafes to discuss their work. The online communities that have erupted in the last few years have changed the literary scene in the Arab world:

Blogs have become sites for literary discussions, for advertising work, for eliciting feedback and opinion, for the exchange of views and contacts and for sharing literary texts; in other words, practices that brought writers together and were traditionally carried out in the literary cafes. In addition, cyber social networks, such as Facebook, have also created forums for discussion and the exchange of ideas. These social networks have enabled the emergence of a multiplicity of communities, literary and otherwise (Elsadda, 2010, ).

She argues that "material conditions of cyber presence, particularly anonymity and accessibility, have a great deal of potential for literary experimentation and the enabling of new voices." Blogs are just one part of the social networking that impact writing.

Ghada ‘Abd al-‘Aal, author of ‘Ayza atgawiz [I want to get married], started her blog, wanna b a bride, in 2006 and has created stories that are “comedies of manners that satirize the institution of marriage and the social norms and practices that regulate the relationship between men and women in society.” (Jane Austen anyone?). Another female Arab blogger, Rihab Bassam, posts short stories on her blog Hawadiyt [Stories] such as Urz bil-laban li-shakhsayn [Rice pudding for two]. A third dives into political currency and turns inward to understand and contemplate how she and her characters fit into the new world. Elsadda sees these women as creators no less equal to literary writers of books. She explains:

The three collections of stories situate the personal center stage. Women’s experiences are foregrounded and their perspectives validated in these narratives... Literary blogs are many things at the same time. They are forums for consciousness raising, social transformation and political mobilization. They are diaries, narratives of the self that are no longer locked up in drawers but made available to an audience (Elsadda, 2010).

## METHODS – RESEARCH QUESTION 1

### AUDIENCE IMPACT SURVEY

To test the research question 1. ***In what way and to what extent does this role of audience communication impact the role of the blogger as an intentional narrative creator?*** an audience impact survey was sent in three batches to 58 email addresses in total on August 24, 2010. The survey was designed to elicit audience comments regarding decision-making for the inception of a new blog. By inviting survey respondents to be a potential audience for a new blog, likely blog readers were engaged in choosing the name for the new blog. The survey group was chosen from a voluntary sample of acquaintances based on the bloggers’ knowledge of their interests. In total, 41 people responded, a 71 percent response rate. Of those 41 who responded with their choice of a blog name, 13 left additional comments. The survey respondents who left comments were identified as the “highly

engaged audience” because of their desire to communicate with additional voluntary feedback. Of the 41 respondents, this “highly engaged audience” represented 31 percent.

The email addresses of those surveyed were viewable by everyone who was sent a survey; there was no use of blind copy with the intention of starting community feedback. Of those 10 additional comments, four people who commented among themselves by replying all.

Limitations include the smaller sample size. While a highly relevant group for the survey topic meant a high response rate, increasing the sample size would be an excellent next step to replicate this survey. Future research could also include a follow-up survey with the original respondents that would include the blog at a later stage of development. Asking respondents questions as to how they feel about their opinions being listened to (or not) by the bloggers would enhance research into of blogger/audience co-creation.

## BLOGGER INTERVIEWS

The interviews included three bloggers. The first, Claudia Hall Christian, is a fiction blogger who posts all her serial fiction online and has been writing and posting her fiction online since 2004. Christian’s blog, [denvercereal.com](http://denvercereal.com), was found by a Google search. After contacting the blogger, who posts her email on her blog, she agreed to the interview. The interviewee was sent a list of questions in advance of the interview. The interview lasted one hour.

The second interview took place with Sabera Photographer, whose blog [onelifetoeat.com](http://onelifetoeat.com) is an Indian cooking blog. Photographer’s blog is not a literary blog, rather a blog dedicated to the novice who wants to learn authentic Indian cooking. Photographer is a communications graduate student at the University of St. Thomas, in Minneapolis, Minnesota and an acquaintance of the author of this study.



The third interview was with Mari Richards, founder of smallforbig.com, a toy design blog marketed to parents of young children. Richards was found through email requests to friends and colleagues for an active blogger not in the food or literary genre. The interview was conducted over the phone and lasted roughly one hour.

Limitations include asking only women bloggers for interviews. While a diverse geographic and ethnic group, additional interviews with other demographic groups would enhance data. Including more interviews may reveal additional areas for study.

## METHODS – RESEARCH QUESTION 2

### BLOGGERS AND THEIR AUDIENCE SURVEY

A survey of 15 questions was sent to 268 bloggers, asking them questions related to the management of comments on their blogs. All invitations to the survey included the author's academic email account, Twitter link and cell phone number for transparency and/or questions. Criteria for choosing bloggers included blogs that had at least three months of active comments and average comments per post were five or more. A diverse sample was sought by soliciting bloggers from different genres including:

- Journalism
- Sports
- Health and Wellness
- Parents
- Women
- Food
- Science
- Technology
- Design
- Politics
- Education
- Finance

Bloggers in these genres were found using Google searches such as “Forbes Best Finance Blogs” “Best Science Blogs” “Best Individual Journalism Blogs” etc. The bloggers in these

search results were sent invitations from the author's university email, Twitter account and by sending private messages when requested on the blogger's site.

The survey was also posted on an Attachment Parenting Yahoo group, an education Yahoo group and on Blogher.com, a blogging clearing house for women bloggers who have reached unstated audience traffic thresholds.

The survey was additionally posted on the author's Facebook page and Twitter account in an attempt at snowball sampling. Only bloggers with active readership were invited to participate.

Limitations include not filtering respondents to be able to group them by blogging genre. A larger survey size would also have provided the ability to have a better sampling of blog management data. By allowing the respondents to remain anonymous, additional follow-up for interviews or surveys was not possible. While some survey respondents emailed to inquire more about the survey and to make comments outside the survey, this was voluntary on their part.

## DISCUSSION OF RESULTS AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature discussed earlier in this paper demonstrates that audience comments to bloggers can and do shape various forms of expression in journalism (Allen, 2011). Blog audiences want to have an impact on their bloggers as they crave social interactions (Haferkamp et al., 2008; Jang et al., 2011), interaction with the blogger (Gilpin et al., 2010) and information sharing (Allan, 2011; Mitra, 2010). The audience wants to impact the actions of the bloggers (Gilpin et al., 2010) and be part of a community (Droge et al., 2010; Mitra, 2010; Petry, 2011; Sanderson, 2010).

If bloggers are having co-creation opportunities with their audiences for the development of products that they care about (Droge et al, 2010), bloggers may have similar co-creation possibilities with audience members who want to take an active role in the development of their *own* expression.

The audience impact survey with a high response rate of 71 percent suggests that voluntary blog readers are very likely to be interested in the decision-making process of a blog. With 31 percent additional respondents leaving comments, this “highly engaged audience” group shows that comments from potential readers who believe their opinion matters to the creators of the blog. Interestingly, there were four additional comments between survey respondents, reinforcing feedback loops theory and suggesting that when readers respond with a positive tone, other readers reply back with a similar positive tone and encourage others to participate using words as “like” and “agree.”

Respondent 4: *I like "Dame Anna" because it sounds like a matriarch's title.*

Respondent 5: *I agree, Dame Anna is the easiest to remember, but I like Y's idea*

Respondent 6: *Hmmm, I agree with X as far as the names you have come up with*

Respondent 7: *I'd have to go with Dame Anna as well.*

(see Appendix A)

The interview with the blogger, Claudia Christian, shaped her fiction in response to the emails from fans and the comments on Facebook. Often she will post a question to Facebook to ask what to do next or if they liked a direction she had taken in the plot line. The second interviewee, Photographer the Indian food blogger, would also post questions to Facebook and then create new content or simply feel better by reading comments. Richards, the toy design blogger said that comments “make my day. Meaty comments fuel me to keep on

going and helps you feel good about the blog and if it's been too much time since a comment, I need that approval. I'm needing that feedback. Even when I shifted to Facebook I've never gotten as many comments as I thought I would," (see Appendix B, 3.) Affective needs of both bloggers desiring co-creation and approval from the audience encouraged multiple feedback loops. These loops can be seen as reasons why both bloggers turned to comments in multiple social media forums that link back to them (the blogger) who in turn was directly impacted by the interaction of their audience.

Neither Photographer nor Christian was interested in advertising on their sites, and both for different reasons. Photographer desired to draw a specific audience and wanted an aesthetic space, clean of ads. Christian believed that online novels should be free and accessible to anyone, just like Charles Dickens with his penny fiction. Their intentional ad-free space confirms their desire to be creators of content for its own sake as they both made decisions "for my audience" (see Appendix B, 1. & 2.). The research from the Audience Impact Survey, the interviews and the literature review support Research Question 1 in that bloggers are impacted by audience participation and create their blog content intentionally with respect to their readers.

With the exception of Richards, Photographer and Christian both experienced negative feedback from commenters. However, comments on Christian's blog were far more abusive which made her feel lonely and almost caused her to shut down her blogs for good. Responding in anger or in a negative tone was never done by either blogger. Interestingly, as a result of the continued negative tone of select commenters, Christian stopped accepting comments on her blog and only allowed interaction from emails, Twitter and Facebook. She said that she believed the blogosphere is "overrun with trolls and scammers" and felt the

real interactions were taking place on more controlled social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter as well as email (see Appendix B, 2.).

Central to all the bloggers' ability to create content was the need for the audience to *care* about the content and like it. The high engagement and high response rate from the Audience Impact Survey suggests that the audience too has an affective desire to be creatively involved in the blog, often talking among themselves and noting how they eagerly await the next installation – a creation or 'post' that will have been impacted by their voice.

All three interviews used language such as "love" "feel" "want" "need" and "fear" when discussing comments from readers. The tone of comments impacted the bloggers management choices for their blog. It was the fear of negative comments (Photographer) that made her conscious of responding to all comments with transparency and calmness, and the experience of negative comments (Christian) which caused the literary blogger to block future comments, accepting only pre-screened subscribers. For Richards, a positive tone encouraged her in specific content directions and impacted her future postings. These findings led to the additional research question 2: ***For bloggers, to choose to allow, limit or block comments, what are the drawbacks or barriers to full expression of the blog? Do audience comments hinder or enhance the blogging process? What best practices can writers of blogs implement to control/block readers' comments?***

The Bloggers and their Audience Survey noted that 58.9 percent of surveyed bloggers accept all comments and delete only those that violate commonly accepted Internet usage guidelines (for example, any of the following: threats of violence, sexually explicit language, obscenity, racially disparaging language, spam, illegal activity, etc.). Christian's experience to block comments after too many negative comments was not reflected in the survey results. Only three respondents from the Bloggers and their Audience Survey block all

comments and all did so from the inception of their blogs. The reasons for blocking did NOT include blocking comments due to negative comments. Reasons were “privacy issues,” “didn’t want to read,” “SPAM” and the “ability to pre-screen.” The majority of those surveyed respond to comments: Always (12.8%) Often (30.7%), Sometimes (33.3%), Rarely (10.2%) and Never (5.1%). This finding supports that bloggers manage comments by directly responding to the individual commenters.

66.6 percent of bloggers respond to negative comments with 33 percent responding in a positive tone, 50 percent in a neutral tone and only 17 percent in a negative tone. However, their readers respond to negative comments from other readers at a much higher rate using a negative tone. 47% of readers respond to negative comments with a negative comment of their own. As one survey respondent noted, “Commenters often mention they are very glad we moderate comments and keep the discourse civil and mature.”

Over half (53.8%) use some kind of software or blogger program like WordPress or CAPTCHA to manage and monitor comments. This actively management of comments with technology suggests a Best Practice guideline.

The primary data and literature review informs the blogger’s use of blogging feedback, as well as other social media forms, on the blog management process. Best practices may include audience research in advance of content or blog development. The use of SPAM software or subscribing readers through pre-approval is another way bloggers have managed comments. Key findings from the Bloggers and their Audience Survey suggest that bloggers who manage to respond to negative posts with transparency and their own positive or neutral tone, will be less likely to see that the negative posts need to be censored. As one blogger stated, “People who post negative comments had another, easier, choice - they could have just gone somewhere else. Those who stick around to post, are

seeking engagement. This is an opportunity to influence their views. Not taking on that challenge means missing this opportunity.”

Media and communication research is already showing that bloggers’ narratives change as a direct result of interaction with their audiences. If anything, the blogger as an intentional creator cannot exist in a vacuum, they and their audiences will be co-creators of evolving forms of expression.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The complexities, problems and potentials of researching creative convergence with online audience interaction has possible applications beyond audience management via the blogosphere. Any form of strategic creation of online content could be informed by audience studies. Institutions interested in online social media engagement can create communications plans in advance of launching online blogs for employee intranets or consumer sites. The blogosphere is dense with blogs that have active audiences. As this online communication rapidly evolves, the possibilities for audience and blogger communications seem endless. The psychology of negative commentary due to the anonymity of commenters continues to be a dilemma for online communicators. Social media sites like LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook require associate trust when the user has a picture and personal details included in their public account. In social media, a name with a face is crucial in building trust and being seen as a credible and reliable source. Listening to what our friends say online rather than what the trolls are saying on blogs is an interesting tension to watch in the blogosphere.

## REFERENCES

- Allan, S. (2011). Introduction: Science journalism in a digital age. *Journalism*. 12(7), 771-777.
- Berlant, Lauren (2006). Cruel Optimism. *Differences*. 17(3), 20-36.
- Dean, J. (2010). Affective Networks. *Mediatropes*. 2(2), 19-44.
- Droge, C., Stanko, M. A., & Pollitte, W. A. (2010). Lead Users and Early Adopters on the Web: The Role of New Technology Product Blogs. *Journal of Product Innovation*. 27(1), 66-82.
- Elsadda, Hoda. (2010). Arab Women Bloggers: The Emergence of Literary Counterpublics. *Middle East Journal of Culture & Communication*, 3(3), 312-332.
- Gilpin, D. R., Palazzolo, E. T., & Brody, N. (2010). Socially Mediated Authenticity. *Journal of Communication Management*. 14(3), 258-278.
- Guillory, B. (2007 Annual Meeting). *A Framing Analysis of Science and Technology Weblogs: How is Science Presented by Commentators?*
- Haferkamp, N., & Krämer, N. (2008). Entering the Blogosphere: Motives for Reading, Writing, and Commenting. *Conference Papers -- International Communication Association*, 1-33.
- Jang, C.-Y., & Stefanone, M. A. (2011). Non-directed Self-Disclosure in the Blogosphere. *Information, Communication & Society*. 14(7), 1039-1059.
- Martens, Marianne. (2011). Transmedia Teens: Affect, Immaterial Labor, and User-generated content. *Convergence*, 17(49).
- Mitra, R. (2010). Resisting the Spectacle of Pride: Queer Indian Bloggers as Interpretive Communities. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 54(1), 163-178.
- Petray, T. L. (2011). Protest 2.0: Online Interactions and Aboriginal Activists. *Media, Culture & Society*, 33(6), 923-940.
- Sanderson, J. (2010). The Nation Stands Behind You: Mobilizing Social Support on 38pitches.com. *Communication Quarterly*. 58(2), 188-206.
- Secko, D. M., Tlalka, S., Dunlop, M., Kingdon, A., & Amend, E. (2011). The Unfinished Science Story: Journalist-Audience Interactions from the Globe and Mail's Online Health and Science Sections. *Journalism*. 12(7), 814-831.



Trammell, K. D. (2005). 05/26/2005 Annual Meeting, New York, NY. *Looking at the Pieces to Understand the Whole: An Analysis of Blog Posts, Comments, and Trackbacks.*

Wicks, R. H., Bradley, A., Blackburn, G., & Fields, T. (2011). Tracking the Blogs: An Evaluation of Attacks, Acclaims, and Rebuttals Presented on Political Blogs During the 2008 Presidential Election. *American Behavioral Scientist*. 55(6), 651-666.

## APPENDIXES

### A. AUDIENCE IMPACT SURVEY

1. Email
2. Comments

### B. INTERVIEWS

1. Interview Questions
2. Claudia Hall Christian
3. Sabera Photographer
4. Mari Richards

### C. BLOGGERS AND THEIR AUDIENCE SURVEY – NEGATIVE COMMENTS

#### **Appendix A – Audience Impact Survey**

##### **1. Audience Impact Survey Email**

(We) have been working on a blog for the last few months – something fun and creative that we can share. Right now we are stuck on the name. Without giving too much detail away (don't want to sway your opinions) we'd love some honest feedback on the name.

We're creating a blog that will include practical/ modern living topics that are inspired by the past—a return to our roots, resourcing nostalgia and rummaging in the bin of memory for useful tips/items/values that will resurface for use today. As Anna was our great-grandmother's name as well as the name of several women in our family, we wanted to incorporate that into the blog's brand.

Again, we need a name and want your HONEST opinions. We're very interested in your initial reactions, ease of understanding and relevance.

Please choose one of the four blog names below:

Dame Anna <http://www.dameanna.com>

Tante Anna <http://tanteanna.com>

Annas Dottirs <http://annasdottirs.com>

Anna Jente <http://annajente.com>

## 2. Audience Impact Survey Comments

1. I think I would only be able to remember Dame Anna.
2. I am a German major so I like "Tante Anna" most. It would stick in my head best, and it does what you want it to do: harks back to traditions and roots. "Dame Anna" sounds too Nanny 911 or butlers and aristocracy to me. Having said that, I realize that much of the world is not Teutonically oriented, so I might be in the minority here. As for the other two, I don't get them right away. Is it in Swedish? My two cents.
3. I really like "Dame Anna". What a great idea. Let me know when it's up and running and I'll definitely check it out!
4. I like "Dame Anna" because it sounds like a matriarch's title.
5. Hmmm, I agree with X as far as the names you have come up with- dameanna is the most memorable. Since you are combining the past with the present, what about incorporating that theme into the domain ("annas revival" for instance). I don't love my suggested name either, but it's the best one I could come up with in 10 seconds :). Good luck and I'll look forward to hearing more about it!
6. I agree, Dame Anna is the easiest to remember, but I like Y's idea...Anna's Revival as well. It kind of tells the story in the name.
7. I'd have to go with Dame Anna as well. The name sounds really classy :) I'm personally against any name that will force you to stick to a niche theme (Revival). Your concept is fairly broad so you want a name that will give the reader a general idea of what they'll expect, but also one that helps you blog about other topics within your larger theme of modern living, in case you get more ideas in the future. My 2c.
8. Dame Anna would be the most memorable name for me.
9. Anyway, the blog sounds great. I have no ideas for names. Just keep me informed, and I'll do what I can.
10. This sounds like a super cool project ~ I think it will resonate with a lot of women. I like Tante Anna and Annas Dottirs. Tante makes me think of grandmas and old time European

fairy tales, while dottirs has the cool Icelandic (other countries, too?) women's names/women's power thing going on. I actually don't know what Jente means ... And I like the word dame if something is outrageous and cheeky or British, but it doesn't sound like that's the vibe of your blog. Keep us posted!

## **Appendix B – Interviews**

### **1. Interview Questions**

What was your initial intention for your blog?

Do you allow comments on your blog posts? If not, do you receive online feedback from your audience? If so, what format?

Do you read the comments?

Do you reply to comments?

How do the comments make you feel about your work?

How do they make you feel about yourself?

Have you changed or updated a past post based on the audience comments?

Have you changed the strategic direction of your blog based on audience comments?

Have you been tempted to reply negatively to a comment?

Why do you think you care about what your audience thinks?

Have you been re-posted?

Has your blog or a post been re-posted via other media like Twitter, Digg, TV, radio?

Are there ads on your site?

Do you receive money from the ads?

What is your long-term strategic plan for your blog?

### **2. Interview with Claudia Hall Christian of Denver Cereal.com, Alexthefey.com and thequeenofcool.com**

The interview with Claudia took place on April 25, 2012 and lasted one hour. [www.denvercereal.com](http://www.denvercereal.com) has between 1000 – 3000 readers.

**What was your initial intention for your blog?**

To create serial fiction, published as it's written and to offer free stories for people like Charles Dickens. "Stories by Claudia" site houses all my fiction and anyone can access anything from the beginning of my blog. It's a catch-all. It's important for people to read for free. I've been blogging serial fiction for four years. I publish a chapter a week, a section of it posting every day. That's 500 - 600 words a day.

**Do you allow comments on your blog posts? If not, do you receive online feedback from your audience? If so, what format?**

Having once accepted comments on my serial fiction blogs, I no longer accept them as only trolls or people trying to sell something had taken over the comments. Email comes from people who contact me as I keep my email address public. I wanted to "create a culture acknowledge people by name and you don't get trolled," but realized that was difficult in the last few years. I also have an active Facebook and Twitter site dedicated and linked to the fiction blogs where I control my friends and monitor the flow. I can take down bad comments on my Facebook pages.

**Do you read the comments?**

Stopped reading Amazon reviews after four negative reviewers targeted her. I read all Facebook and emails. Facebook is like crack. I get emails from people who contact me. They're regular readers. I have 1000-3000 at a time.

I also create polls on the blog. A good place to leave comments.

**Do you reply to comments?**

Believes that genuine comments have gone away because their ultimate motive now is to have re-link to their site. Very rare that genuine interaction exists anymore on blogs. Now they use Facebook and Twitter. If you create a culture, acknowledge people by name, you might not get trolls.

**How do the comments make you feel about your work?**

The emails from fans and the comments on Facebook have shaped the d

**How do they make you feel about yourself?**

"It's very hard. I can't say people's comments don't affect me."

**Have you changed or updated a past post based on the audience comments?**

Yes. I had a black character who was marginal in the plot. People got on me for it and so I evolved her and now she's central and an important hero to my readers.

**Have you changed the strategic direction of your blog based on audience comments?**

Yes. I intended for one character who'd committed murder to stand trial and be served justice by a jail sentence. I asked my readers what they thought. Everyone hated that idea. They wanted him to suffer, "Vomiting eggs!" So I had an alien invade his body. Bono said, "All the stories exist. I am just finding them."

I get great inspiration from Facebook pages.

**Have you been tempted to reply negatively to a comment?**

Tempted briefly, but never. With four very negative Amazon reviewers, I almost stopped blogging.

**Why do you think you care about what your audience thinks?**

I write for people who are 'wait-ers', they are waiting for their kids, in line, at the doctor. I want to write about 'changemakers', flawed people who I give an opportunity to be remade. Denver Cereal is a labor of love. I wanted to create a world that people can engage with. Honor that in people.

**Have you been re-posted?**

Yes. I believe that genuine blog posts have gone away. That time is gone. It's very rare to have a genuine interaction. Usually they have ulterior motives like a re-link.

**Has your blog or a post been re-posted via other media like Twitter, Digg, TV, radio?**

Yes. All the time on Twitter and Digg.

**Are there ads on your site?**

No. Just social and community links of interest.

**Do you receive money from the ads?**

N/A. I believe I've made more money in book deals than had I gone the route of accepting advertising. The influence of money can't be underestimated. Taking money to write about products. The role of corporate sponsorship can't be underestimated.

**What is your long-term strategic plan for your blog?**

Some bloggers have changed their strategy to be a "smart blogger" who makes a living by doing a coupon site or free days. People who make a real living don't do ads/re-links because they are great at what they do and the other groups are just crabs in a barrel. Money is in selling great content. I delete emails from people asking about my product. It's a rabbit hole.

My goal is to keep it as clean as possible so it's easy to read. I keep the sidebars clean and the font big. Charles Dickens is my mentor. He said "be able to write things that people can read and have it be available to people who are poor."

### **3. Interview with Sabera Photographer of [onelifetoeat.com](http://onelifetoeat.com).**

Interview on May 1, 2012. Interview lasted one hour via phone. [www.onelifetoeat.com](http://www.onelifetoeat.com) averages 5 to 7 comments per blog post.

#### **Intention for blog**

Attract new audiences modern Indian woman and English-speaking non-Indians who wanted to learn Indian cooking and bust myths of difficulty. So simplify cooking. How I wrote? I didn't use Hindi words, but if I did, I'd link them to Wikipedia and made it an interesting experience for the non-Indian audience as well. The audience needs were important to me...wanted to have a place that was happy. Wanted a marketing plan, but it came very naturally and I designed it (the blog) for them.

I think I felt like the blog was heading where I wanted it to, when people started writing back about how they tried my recipe and loved it. Or how someone used my recipes to cook for their Mom. That's when I realized that the blogging wasn't just for nothing. (She sighs happily).

What I also experienced was, when I started writing about my local community and incorporating it in my posts, the blog started getting noticed by media that covered the southwest suburbs, which is where I live. When this happens, its a great exposure for your blog and readership.

#### **Do you read the comments?**

Yes. Always planned on it being collaborative and hoped that people would comment on it.

#### **Do you reply to comments?**

Yes. Sometimes they will say "my mother made it this way" I'd respond and talked the content evolved on what people left (on the comments) and based new posts on it. Wanted a two-way communication.

#### **How do the comments make you feel about your work?**

Mixed feelings. When people said they don't like it or state "this is how I would make it," I would take it personally but as I got more confident in my writing...initially I was defensive, but now I love it.

I made a Chinese Indian fusion recipe and someone said I was butchering Chinese food, but instead, I opened up to my community on Facebook and said "what do you think? Should recipes stay authentic?" I got long strings of comments and people could share their ideas. Most of the volume is happening on the blog, but Facebook I get a lot of the liking, not the comments. They will share on my wall, but don't leave a comment. I am trying to post

content that my fans like, will they share on their Facebook wall? I did it just to get more recognition, but then found that it was a community engagement tool, rather than building readership.

**How do they make you feel about yourself?**

I felt amazing all day when they said they made a recipe and loved it! My writing is helping someone. It feels really good (laughter).

**Have you changed or updated a past post based on comments?**

Yes. I used to do that quite a bit initially. Someone would say this is not the English name for this lentil. I would say “oh thank you so much” and then I’d leave a note about the update based on the comment. I want people to say “oh this person is open to changing their content.”

**Have you been tempted to reply negatively to a comment?**

No. Sometimes I really wanted to, but made a very conscious decision to NOT reply negatively, but make any comment towards me as feedback and just reframe it and always say thank you. Word Press is really good at weeding out spam. Not a huge issue. I know that fashion bloggers get a lot of negative comments.

**Why do you think you care about what your audience thinks?**

I’m not making any money. I’m not getting any real recognition, but I’m very conscious of the fact that I’m on a public space online and rent for free this space online and I should be responsible for what I write, I should quantify what I write and at least address what they don’t like. A reciprocal relationship on the blog. If I give them better content, then I’ve done something right. I spend so much time taking photographs and am subconsciously working to give them what they like. I don’t get anything tangible but I care about what they need and that makes me feel good. Some bloggers are competitive and just want hits and ONLY care about increasing readership. Even if they don’t get money, they just want more hits. I didn’t want to do that and I didn’t want that. I wanted to appeal to a specific audience.

**Have you been reposted?**

All the time! Sometimes people use my post as a reference for recipes and a way to say, “I’ve been looking for a blog for a long time.” Plus, from food blogger friends.

**Has your blog or a post been re-posted via other media like Twitter, Digg, TV, radio?**

Yes. So I’ve tried to optimize my posting times based on that. And I researched how to do this. I use Hotspot—when is the best time to tweet. Content that is interesting but not professionally aligned, I try to tweet them. Radio too. I go on local AM station - the radio station for the Minneapolis Farmers Market. Station is local. AM 950 to talk and I’ll talk about how to use the veggies of the day.

**Are there ads on your site?**

I made a conscious decision because it means another person is taking away your space and am not comfortable for someone being on my space and it takes away from the visual and total experience of my readers.

**Do you receive money from the ads?**

N/A

**Long-term plan?**

I want to do more fusion recipes. Using local Midwestern vegetables. I want to do more recipes that are good for kids.

**4. Interview Responses with Mari Richards of Smallforbig.com**

The interview with Mari took place on July 18, 2012 and lasted one hour. [www.smallforbig.com](http://www.smallforbig.com) has over 113,000 page views a month, 84,600 visitors and over 67,500 unique visitors every month.

**Do you accept comments on your blog?**

Yes. I love to get them. I wish I had more.

**Do you read the comments?**

Oh yes. All. I don't get as many as I like. I try to read all of them as soon as possible. I have a great community and my hits are really high and the amount of comments don't seem to align with the high hit rate.

**Do you reply to comments?**

Always reply on site. I use a good spam filter. I can at least acknowledge the spam with a "thank-you, not interested" to keep it positive.

**How do the comments make you feel about your work?**

Labor of love. They make my day. Meaty comments fuel me to keep on going and helps you feel good about the blog and if it's been too much time since a comment, I need that approval. I'm needing that feedback. Even when I shifted to Facebook I've never gotten as many comments as I thought I would.

**How do they make you feel about yourself?**

I think it's about that approval.



**Have you changed or updated a past post based on comments?**

Yes. In fact, I wish I had more meaty comments so I could make decisions based on that. If I think its spam or if its not useful, I'll mark it as spam and remove the comment.

**Have you been tempted to reply negatively to a comment?**

There was a nasty comment about me posted on forum. The nasty comment was just one thing but just not about the blog and while I commented once on the forum in to respond, I realized their complaints weren't really about me.

I link on Facebook and sometimes there are forceful opinions I disagree with. I try to avoid conflict where I try to remain respectful and keep an open dialogue, but I don't engage strongly with forceful opinions.

I have an email feedback to readers who subscribe.

**Why do you think you care about what your audience thinks?**

I really wish I had more comments from readers because I want to make them happy and coming back. It would really shape my work. I would love to do surveys and get more meaty comments from readers. The likes are not useful, I love them but they don't really help me decide on a course of action. Likes are not much feedback. Wish I had more comments from my readers. I need that connection to tone my posts and check to see if they are as creative as they need to be.

**Have you been reposted?**

Yes. Often I use tracking software on WordPress and get email.

**Has your blog or a post been re-posted via other media like Twitter, Digg, TV, radio?**

All the time.

**Are there ads on your site?**

On the right hand side.

**Do you receive money from the ads?**

Yes. The blog's successful!

**What was your initial intention for blog?**

I was laid off from a job and had a new baby. I wanted to stay in the toy design business and a blog was easier with a new baby.

**Long-term plan?**

I tend to post on things that are relevant to my daughter and I've noticed as she grows up, I have less baby posts and more older kid designs. When she's a teenager, I'll really have to reconsider if the blog should end. Blogs are kind of in the moment and it might not be relevant.

### **Mapping of Interview Responses**

## Bloggers and their Audience Survey – Negative Comments

Survey closed August 21, 2012. 39 total responses.

1. **This survey is interested in how you manage comments from people who visit your blog. Choose from one of the following below. On your blog, do you...**

	Number of Response(s)	Response Ratio
Accept all comments and leave them visible to all readers?	4	10.2%
Accept all comments, only deleting those that violate commonly accepted Internet usage guidelines (for example, any of the following: threats of violence, sexually explicit language, obscenity, racially disparaging language, spam, illegal activity, etc.)?	23	58.9%
Accept all comments, deleting comments for additional reasons than those that violate commonly accepted Internet usage guidelines?	5	12.8%
Accept comments only from pre-screened readers (e.g. subscribers)?	2	5.1%
Block all comments?	3	7.6%
Other	2	5.1%
No Responses	0	0.0%
<b>Total</b>	39	100%
8 Comment(s)		

Comments Question 1
Generally, I get positive comments. I delete obvious spam.
I don't put spam comment through.
When I started the blog, I promised my first readers in my "manifesto" that I would delete any comments that degenerated from civil debate to idiotic name-calling. Remarkably, I have not had one negative comment or virtual "fight" break out in my blog. Might have something to do with the makeup of my audience - many like-minded people.
I delete spam comments and I close comments on posts older than a few months because I find that's where the spammers are most likely to comment. I usually leave up negative comments because the commenter will look stupid long after he or she has calmed down.

I do except original and creative obscenities aimed at me. But no rants against others who do not contribute substantially to the blog (i.e. no one).
We typically only delete comments that are spam.
I've got decent readership, but not a terribly active commentariat, so I've really only ever had to delete spam that's gotten through the filters.
The rule is we don't allow clutter in our homes, so we don't allow it on our website.

2. *Auto skipped by all respondents except those who chose the response "Block All Comments."* **You answered that you block all comments from your blog. Have you always blocked comments?**

		Number of Response(s)	Response Ratio
Yes		3	7.6%
No		0	0.0%
No Responses		36	92.3%
<b>Total</b>		39	100%
0 Comment(s)			

3. *Auto skipped by all respondents except those who answered question 2.* **Why did you decide to block comments? List as many reasons as needed.**

	Number of Response(s)	Response Ratio
Negative comments	0	0.0%
Felt comments were changing the nature of the blog	0	0.0%
Inappropriate comments	0	0.0%
Didn't want to read comments	1	33.3%
Didn't want others to read comments	0	0.0%
To eliminate clutter	0	0.0%

For design reasons	0	0.0%
At request from advertiser(s)	0	0.0%
At request from institution/employer	0	0.0%
Privacy issues	1	33.3%
Felt threatened by comments	0	0.0%
SPAM	1	33.3%
Other	1	33.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>100%</b>
1 Comment(s)		

<b>Answer to Other</b>
wanted to pre-screen comments before posting

<b>Comments to Question 3</b>
I didn't want to spend time moderating the comments.

*Questions 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9 were auto skipped by respondents directed to answer questions 2 and 3.*

4. *Auto skipped by those who responded to questions 2 and 3.*

**How often do you respond to comments?**

	Number of Response(s)	Response Ratio
Always	5	12.8%
Often	12	30.7%
Sometimes	13	33.3%
Rarely	4	10.2%

Never		2	5.1%
No Responses		3	7.6%
<b>Total</b>		39	100%
5 Comment(s)			

<b>Comments Question 4</b>	
That is, unless they're spam.	
Only if the comment is a question.	
It depends on the comment left.	
I don't get many, so I try very hard to respond--also, they're also generally explicitly questions that require answers.	
we rarely get comments	

#### 5. Do you respond to negative comments?

		<b>Number of Response(s)</b>	<b>Response Ratio</b>
Yes		26	66.6%
No		8	20.5%
No Responses		5	12.8%
<b>Total</b>		39	100%
10 Comment(s)			

<b>Comments Question 5</b>	
Only when the negativity is an argument regarding the *content* of the post.	
I would if I got any.	
Sometimes, if I feel the need to clarify something for the sake of future readers who will see the negative comment (ie, to stand up for myself or my views, or for something else that's being attacked.)	

Depending on the tone and the content. The purpose of our website is to provide non-partisan data and our blog is primarily to promote that data -- when someone leaves a comment or a question that indicates they're unaware of what our website has to offer we will frequently reply with a helpful link.
I will respond to negative comments if they are phrased politely, and I usually thank the commentator for being respectful. Flat out trolls just get deleted.
NA
Not sure that I've had any that could be construed as negative, so this is more of an N/A.
If they use ad hominem attacks, foul language, or are irrelevant to the topic of the post, they are simply deleted. Valuable negative comments are only addressed if it appears an item is has been misunderstood from the post.
we don't get them
People who post negative comments had another, easier, choice - they could have just gone somewhere else. Those who stick around to post, are seeking engagement. This is an opportunity to influence their views. Not taking on that challenge means missing this opportunity.

**6. When responding to negative comments, think of how you typically respond.  
Please rate the tone of your response.**

Top number is the count of respondents selecting the option. Bottom % is percent of the total respondents selecting the option.	Positive	Neutral	Negative
	8	12	4
	33%	50%	17%
6 Comment(s)			

Comments Question 6
I am very open minded and blog as such. I don't see why people come on my blog and respond so close minded. They should just start their own blog
We try to offer a helpful response when someone's negative comment indicates they're unaware of information that we provide.
I try not to insult anyone, but I can disagree with the best of them.
To be honest, I have never had a negative comment. I write one act humorous plays. I intentionally keep my audience in mind and do not use the blog as an outlet to criticize others. It is a judgement

free zone.
I always try to be as positive as possible. I don't try to encourage conflict. However, I run a book blog and don't run into an overwhelming amount of negative comments.
Actually, I like to think my tone is positive, but considering that I likely disagree with the negative comment and respond accordingly, the overall response is most likely "negative."

**7. Do your readers respond to negative comments from other readers?**

		<b>Number of Response(s)</b>	<b>Response Ratio</b>
Yes		20	51.2%
No		14	35.8%
No Responses		5	12.8%
<b>Total</b>		39	100%
7 Comment(s)			

<b>Comments Question 7</b>
Haven't had one yet.
See above. It hasn't happened yet
Not always but some have. Never aggressively but rather to express an alternate view point.
Most of my readers are mothers of children with a life threatening medical condition. They tend to be quite, um, determined to educate those who might endanger their children!
Don't really have that kind of dialog on my site.
Again, largely NA. But if they did get into a argument, riot acts would be read.
As long as the conversation is mature and civil, these comments are allowed to remain. Again, ad hominem attacks, foul language, and comments not related to the topic of the post are deleted.

**8. Rate the tone of your average reader who responds to negative comments from other readers.**

Top number is the count of respondents selecting the option. Bottom % is percent of the total respondents selecting the option.	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Negative</b>
--	-----------------	----------------	-----------------



	6	4	9
	32%	21%	47%
1 Comment(s)			

**Comments Question 8**

Commenters often mention they are very glad we moderate comments and keep the discourse civil and mature.

9. **Do you use a software or blogger program to manage comments? If so, please list the type in the comment box.**

		Number of Response(s)	Response Ratio
Yes		21	53.8%
No		14	35.8%
No Responses		4	10.2%
<b>Total</b>		39	100%
19 Comment(s)			

**Comments Question 9**

It's supposed to be built into the typepad software I use, but a lot of spam still gets through!

I use wordpress

akismet spam program

Wordpress

built-in wordpress comment management

WordPress

Blogger.com

Word Press

Disqus

Typepad CAPTCHA
Google Blogger and wordpress depending on the blog
I use WordPress
I use Blogger's internal management system for comments. Anything posted over two weeks after the initial blog post has to be ok'd so spam doesn't invade older posts.
Wordpress
I use the built in blogspot program.
Just WordPress
whatever typepad uses.
Akismet
wordpress and typepad

*All respondents were directed to answer questions 10 – 15.*

**10. How long have you been blogging?**

		Number of Response(s)	Response Ratio
less than 1 year		3	7.6%
1-2 years		2	5.1%
3-4 years		8	20.5%
4-5 years		12	30.7%
6 or more years		10	25.6%
No Responses		4	10.2%
<b>Total</b>		39	100%
1 Comment(s)			

**Comments Question 10**

About 4 months

**11. How long have you had your current blog?**

		Number of Response(s)	Response Ratio
less than 1 year		5	12.8%
1-2 years		4	10.2%
3-4 years		8	20.5%
4-5 years		11	28.2%
6 or more years		7	17.9%
No Responses		4	10.2%
<b>Total</b>		39	100%
1 Comment(s)			

**Comments Question 11**

about 4 months. I have a business blog I have been running for 2 months

**12. Does your blog generate income?**

		Number of Response(s)	Response Ratio
Yes		14	35.8%
No		17	43.5%
Prefer not to answer		4	10.2%
No Responses		4	10.2%
<b>Total</b>		39	100%
4 Comment(s)			
<b>Comments Question 12</b>			
Not directly; however, it has been through people meeting me via my blog that I have found other freelance jobs.			
A ridiculously tiny amount.			
I have chosen not to monetize or accept advertisements.			
a tiny tiny bit			

**13. Are you...**

	Number of Response(s)	Response Ratio
Female	24	61.5%
Male	10	25.6%
Prefer not to answer	1	2.5%
No Responses	4	10.2%
<b>Total</b>	39	100%

## 14. Please choose your age range below.

	Number of Response(s)	Response Ratio
18-21	0	0.0%
22-25	0	0.0%
26-30	4	10.2%
31-40	25	64.1%
41-50	4	10.2%
51-60	2	5.1%
61-70	0	0.0%
71+	0	0.0%
No Responses	4	10.2%
<b>Total</b>	39	100%

## 15. Please add any additional information about your blogging experience as it relates to your audience.

10 Responses
I wish I had more time for blogging!
Bogging lets me share my ideas with other mommas!
spam is so out of control that it takes hours to delete all of it on a regular basis.
<p>I started blogging on LiveJournal when it first hit the scene (10+ years ago, when I was in college.) I had a larger audience back then, with a lot of interaction - mostly me with them, not so much them with each other. My current Blogger blog is just over a year old, and I post links to new posts on my personal Facebook page since this blog only has 15 followers (I have 700+ FB friends.) I've noticed that few people comment on the blog post itself, and instead comment on the FB link to the blog entry. I think this is unfortunate, since people stopping by the blog won't get the benefit of seeing relevant comments on my FB profile.</p> <hr/> <p>I have found that my ability to respond in a constructive manner has improved. I used to respond negatively to criticism (and perceived criticism). I have rather strong views on controversial topics (vaccines, diet, etc) and have gotten some harsh comments, and am pleased that I'm learning to keep</p>

my cool now. My new motto: kindly educate, don't berate...
My audience consists mainly of people who are open minded, liberal and do not take themselves too seriously. So far, the comments I receive are mostly sent to me by email and not posted on the blog
I blog about crime fiction, so my audience is pretty niche; I think that minimizes the negativity. I also don't post negative book reviews, so my posts remaining positive help to keep the comments positive as well, I believe. I blog to encourage and promote reading. Negativity doesn't work to further my mission.
My blog is largely related to my work and research, and I would say that most people who read it probably tend to agree with my own angle and viewpoints, so I really do not get many comments at all. (And let's face it, I do not have *that* many readers at this point.) I am more likely to elicit a response from a Twitter follower after posting a link to the blog than a comment on the blog itself.
In the last five years, a lot of the interaction with the audience has moved off the blog and onto Facebook and Twitter. Often the response to a post will be on the blog's FB page or tweeted, rather than in the comments section itself.
In general, a food blog getting about 60-70 unique visitors/daily. More if I get picked up by tastepotting or something. Comments are not heavy, and usually fall into two categories: 1) people asking for clarifications on a recipe or 2) friends saying that they either have had or want to have whatever I'm writing about.
In the beginning, we had some pushback from readers about how we take down "nasty gram" comments (disrespectful comments that add nothing to the conversation). After two weeks, the pushback stopped and we rarely hear peep about it. People express ideas in opposition to our posts all the time, and as long as they are respectful and topical, we let the comments stay. Since the tone is so respectful, too, most people self moderate and know nasty comments will be removed so don't ever write them. As I said earlier, though, our motto is we don't allow clutter in our homes, so we don't let it on our blog. Nasty grams are clutter.